

March 1976
U.S. Catholic



The Rev. Billy Graham. Father Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C. Two men. Two completely different styles. Graham, the evangelist, the preacher, the man of words, wields a Bible. Hesburgh, the executive, the pragmatist, and the social activist, balances high principles with annual reports. Completely different, but perhaps, just perhaps, cut from the same cloth. Graham, the apostle of personal salvation, complains that the social content of his message is often missed. Hesburgh, known for his vocal positions on war, civil rights, and world hunger, is devoted to the rosary.

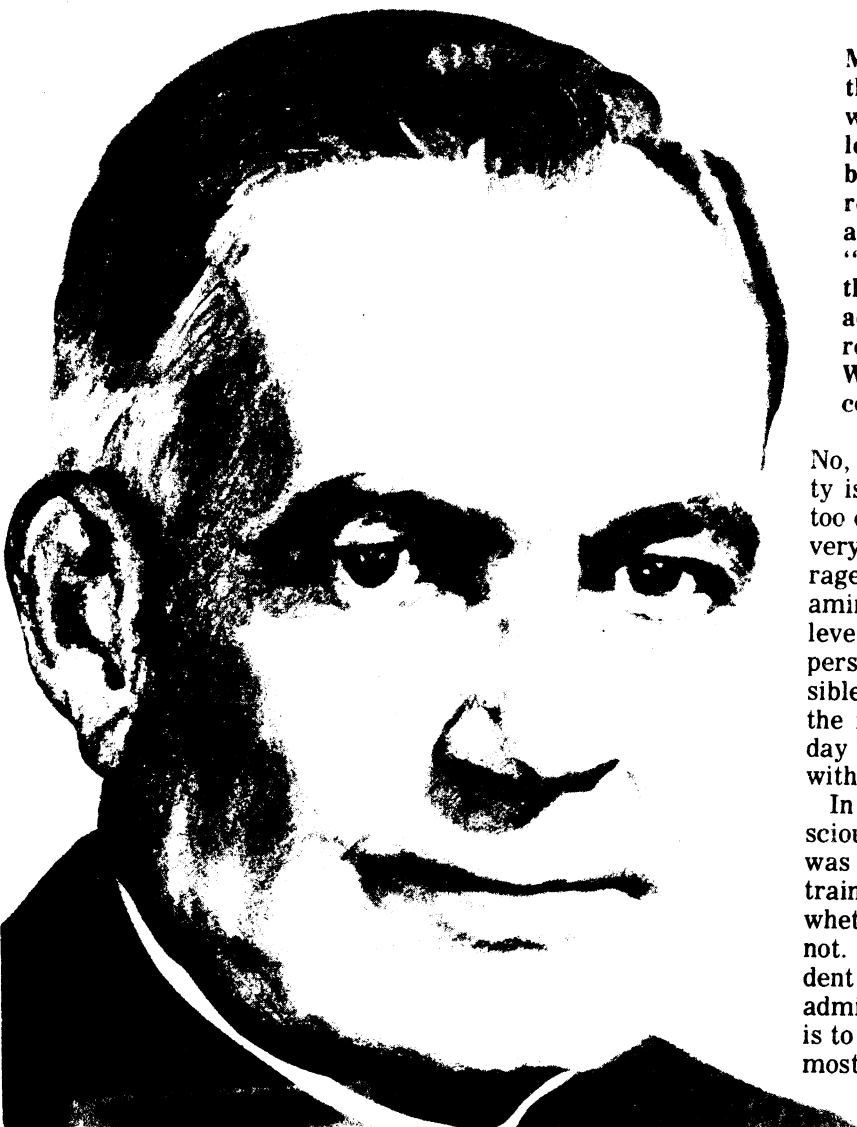
Revival Tents and Golden Domes

EDWARD WAKIN interviews FATHER THEODORE M. HESBURGH, C.S.C.

More and more, those of us who stand outside the "corridors of power" are questioning and worrying about what is happening at the highest levels of our society. Not only about government, but about business, finance, education, religion—all the institutions where you operate at the summit. Let's use a familiar phrase, the "Watergate morality," to sum up much more than the practices of a particular presidential administration. The fear is that moral responsibility has collapsed in America and that Watergate was only a parable personifying the collapse.

No, I don't think in any way that the Watergate morality is the morality of American institutional life. It's too easy, too naive, too sweeping a judgment. A lot of very good people in America were shocked and outraged by Watergate and I think it made them re-examine some of their practices. I have found a raised level of consciousness regarding moral implications of personal actions, especially by people who are responsible in government, business, and education. They see the individual crises and the larger crises they face day by day as their "Watergates" and they try to deal with them in the moral way.

In my own context of higher education, I am conscious of the fact that everyone involved in Watergate was a product of higher education. They were not trained to ask the fundamental question which was not whether or not it would work, but whether it's right or not. I still remember what my predecessor as president of Notre Dame told me. The simplest approach to administration every time you have to make a decision is to ask yourself not what is the easiest, cheapest, or most popular thing to do, but what is the right thing to



do. Do it, if it's the right thing to do. Many people in positions of responsibility are conscious of that basic consideration.

That may be so, but what about the moral uneasiness, the malaise that observers find among Americans in general.

There has always been moral malaise. That's what we call conscience. I don't know anyone who's satisfied with his or her life to the extent that he or she doesn't have malaise. The day we don't have moral uneasiness conscience would be dead. It's not the malaise that bothers me. What bothers me is that we don't get enough leadership based on moral concepts that give people a vision of what a better world could be and how each of us must collaborate in making a better world.

What has been emerging from your lectures and your recent book, *The Human Imperative*, is a "vision of our interdependent world." Since this is clearly the vision that you want our leaders to project, how do you spell out such a world view?

Sometimes a picture is worth a million words. Take the view of the earth from the moon. Instead of 3.6 billion people, think of a crew of five persons, each representing a segment of humanity. The person representing us and our world, mostly Judeo-Christian, white, Western, affluent, has the use of 80 percent of the available life resources and amenities aboard our spacecraft. The other four crew members must share the 20 percent that is left. The situation is still deteriorating.

Our crewman is increasing his share to 90 percent at the moment, leaving two and a half percent for each of the other crew members. Can you imagine much lasting peace or order or good life aboard this spacecraft? The other crew members are not just uneasy and frustrated, they are outraged, as well as hungry and hopeless, since our person also seems to have the only lethal weapon aboard. If our person—we ourselves—does not begin to perceive the utter injustice of the situation, and begin to organize the use of these finite resources in a more just fashion, he will ultimately, inevitably be overwhelmed by some manner of violence.

Where should this picture of Spaceship Earth lead us in terms of today's realities?

My thesis is that we have every theological, philosophical, and humane imperative to change, to respond, and we can find creative ways of doing so. And we must, if we wish peace, as well as survival. I have been heartened by the words of Faulkner in receiving the Nobel Prize for literature: "Man will not simply

endure; he will prevail." But mankind will not automatically prevail.

Specifically . . .

For interdependence to become a central concern in the Western world, somehow it must be related to the key theological and philosophical principles that characterize our culture today. Theologically, we might begin by answering the question of Cain in the book of Genesis: "Am I my brother's keeper?" I hope we answer "Yes."

The movement to ecumenism—new understanding between and among Christians first, and then a broader religious understanding between Christians and non-Christians—is a most important underpinning for unity among the great majority of earth dwellers who believe in God. . . . Independence will be meaningless until we show in practice that justice to men and women and children everywhere is our goal. . . . The material realities of food, housing, and health are important because they provide the indispensable material context within which human dignity may be a reality and not a travesty. As one who has worked for more than a decade with the Rockefeller Foundation on the Green Revolution, I can assure you that the world can feed itself if it really decides to do so.

No one would argue with such views. But how?

Actually, I'm involved in planning for a lobby that will be global in its concern. In other words, there's a gun lobby, an oil lobby, a milk lobby—all kinds of lobbies except a lobby for peace, for justice in the world scene, for food in the midst of hunger. Such a lobby can draw participation from young and old, black and white, rich and poor, the educated and those with limited education, activists and non-activists. It will give them a chance to do something and not feel helpless and hopeless. There's no mechanism like this today and it would enable individuals to become involved.

What do you have to say to concerned individuals who want to respond to the challenges you set forth?

Well, we've got to do something where we are. We really have to work to get our government to be more generous in setting up a world food bank and we have to get behind organizations that are working in the field—such as Catholic Relief Services, World Relief Service, CARE. Much of that involves the local scene. We also must do a great deal of education work so people understand the dimensions of hunger and the ways of getting at it.

Let's locate the Catholic Church in this challenging vision of interdependence and change. You have cited the need for leadership. What about the leadership of the Catholic Church, the U.S. hierarchy?

The bishops have a very difficult job today and I don't take part in what used to be a popular indoor sport—it isn't anymore—of baiting the hierarchy. All the bishops I know are working very hard to relate to the people. It's not an easy equation to come up with. The church has changed so much that the type of leadership needed at the top is 180 degrees different from that of 10 or 15 years ago. At that time, you could give out orders and something was done. It's a different society, a different church, and a different clientele. In the past, there just was no open conversation about what everyone was trying to do for the Kingdom of God.

The problem we have now—and this is true of higher education and many other areas—is that the older leadership finds that its total lifestyle and approach are completely different from what are needed today. What you find is a gradual turnover in leadership with the younger members of the hierarchy. I personally am very pleased with those who are coming into the leadership of the church.

Are you referring to a trend with more emphasis on participation rather than on leadership?

Not entirely. The church has a great deal of participation, but you suddenly can't change the church into a democracy. The bishop has the authority to say something and others have the obligation of following. He has the power to do this in a direct and authoritarian way, but it won't be very effective. Rather than being authoritarian today, the church leadership will use persuasion, example, and lifestyle to bring people along.

In all this, do you see a drift away from the authority of Rome?

I think certainly when we say Rome we mean the Holy Father, and certainly all Christians should revere him and respond to his leadership. You're not going to change that unless you change Christian doctrine. But you can also talk about Rome in terms of many people working in different offices, in many ways as in a large government. There is the Vatican Secretary of State and other people all the way down the line. They aren't on the same level as the Holy Father, and there is much more give-and-take in relationships with them than before the Council. That's a simple fact. There is much more collegiality today.

Some observers might speculate that the changes involving Rome and the American Church could lead to serious differences. Do you see any prospect of a schism?

No, I don't. I think it would be a silly thing. I don't see any prospect of it.

In terms of Catholics as Americans, what changes stand out in your mind?

Certainly, we've taken a great step forward during the Vietnam experience. During World War II, it was almost assumed that Catholics were not only patriotic but it wasn't Catholic to be a conscientious objector. For those of us who went through World War II, it never crossed our minds to be a conscientious objector. Hitler and Tojo were monsters and we were trying to put justice back in the world and achieve world peace.

In Vietnam, we were confronted with a much more difficult problem in a war that was much harder to justify. This may be the first case in the history of mankind where the young people actually changed the moral stance of their elders. The young were the first to protest against the war in large numbers and the more they dug into the moral justification for the Vietnam war the more they began to persuade their elders that they had a point. I think that by the end of the Vietnam war the great majority of the older generation agreed with the younger generation.

What has this meant to the concept of patriotism?

Patriotism has a much larger context than it ever had before. Patriotism had been waving the flag, putting on a uniform, and going off to war. Today, a young person in the Peace Corps is patriotic. You can be patriotic as a scholar, as a public servant, as a mother and father in a good family—you can be patriotic in a thousand ways because you're serving your country.

What about the religious presence of the Catholic Church? This was once dramatized by highly visible symbols, such as the Rosary and Novenas. If you once could know Catholics by such symbols, what symbols do you see today?

Service is one big symbol. Its symbolism does not come out in a material thing like Rosary beads or a station on the wall, but it's visible and certainly symbolic in a person's life. What has always bothered me is that in my youth many people prayed the Rosary, went to church regularly, performed acts of devotion, stuck little prayers in their prayer book to say every

day, and never did anything to right the injustice that was around them. In their conversation, they often used racist terms and never felt there was anything un-Christian about that. In other words, I think it's quite possible to have all the symbols and still be quite un-Christian. So we ought to begin with symbols which get at the heart of what Christianity is.

How then to begin?

I think it is loving God and loving neighbor.

At the same time, I find that today people are much given to service, but don't pray. I don't think you can be involved in deep service on a continual, constant basis without having a fundamental commitment to the Kingdom of God, God himself, and Christ—which means some relationship to prayer, supplication, adoration, and all the rest. So we're always between the rock and the hard place: too much spiritual symbolism and not enough Christian service or a great deal of Christian service with very little prayer. You must have some of both.

A lot of my life goes into service but I still say the Rosary every day. I spend a lot of time on social justice in one context or another, but I still say Mass every day because I think it's very important not just for me, but for the whole world. The composite of these things is needed today. I also agree that we have to find new kinds of Christian symbolism not only to strengthen ourselves but to give some evidence to the world of our witness.

How then would you describe the way in which a committed Christian confronts the world around all of us—a world that is confusing, threatening, challenging, changing at an accelerating rate?

Each one of us has to be at peace, feeling a certain amount of confidence toward what we are and what we can't change and a sense of how to react to things we can change—with a system of values that bears on the latter. I would say that young people are looking for meaning in life and there is no meaning in life unless there is a certain amount of reason to it. Having values enables you to put meaning or derive meaning from your life and your efforts. In our case, there is satisfaction in knowing that we have a philosophy of life, which is Christian or Catholic, and is based on a fixed revelation from the Lord and involves certain basic values. Basically, we can have confidence in time and eternity. We're not confused each day. Each day is not a fright. Each day we have a goal in life and we're conscious of it.

Anyone who is aware of your many activities becomes curious about how you translate this into real-life situations. As you move from one

policy-making summit situation to another, are you conscious of making a particular contribution as a priest or as a Catholic?

I think if it were conscious, it would probably be pretentious. I can't abstract from the fact that I am a priest; it's the most important thing in my life and it's going to effect the way I think, judge, and act. Besides being a priest, I am also a human being, a man, a Christian, an American. I'm also 58 years old. All these things enter into judgments and enter into the way I act. I don't think one can dissect one's acts.

Still, what difference does it make that you are sitting in so many influential chairs?

It makes a difference if I happen to bring to the policy-making process some background, experience, thoughts, and actions that wouldn't be there if I weren't. I think I do.

Then you don't think you're being "used" by the secular organizations you are involved with, including multinational corporations.

If I thought I was being used, I wouldn't be there. That's my personal judgment, of course, and I don't think anyone is infallible in their personal judgments.

You must feel that these organizations in which you sit on the board in policy-making roles are open to moral influence.

If they weren't I wouldn't be there. I can tell you that. I can find that out very quickly. If that is the case, I leave.

Between an optimist and pessimist, what does that make you?

An optimist.

What does that mean in your life of action and what does it say to the rest of us?

I think, as I've mentioned, that you've got to have meaning in your life. You've got to get up in the morning with some sense that today is not going to be just an exercise in drudgery or routine, but something is going to happen because you're living that day. It's going to give you a little satisfaction that it's going to make the world a little better. We can't all be presidents, but we can all do something in our own ways to make a difference. Meaning in life comes from making a difference by the way one lives in the achievement of justice and peace for the world and the coming of the Kingdom of God.

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